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SUBJECT: The Soft Side of Plan Colombia - Special Social
Programs of the Uribe Administration

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1. SUMMARY. Since the advent of Plan Colombia in 1999, the GOC has spent over USD one billion on special social and economic development programs to fight narcotrafficking, poverty and violence, and the Uribe administration has committed USD 470 million to these programs in the 2006 budget. A total of 4 million Colombians, roughly 10 percent of the total population, are now beneficiaries of these programs in 800 of the country's 1,098 municipalities. Through these efforts nearly every indicator of social development at the national level has shown marked improvement. In June 2005, President Uribe created a single organization called Accion Social to better coordinate these efforts. Accion Social is leading the GOC's effort to expand social programs to those communities most affected by the country's internal conflict. END SUMMARY.

A NEW ORGANIZATION

2. In July 2005, Presidential decree 2467 combined three social development agencies into one - the Presidential Agency for Social Action and International Cooperation, commonly known as Accion Social. The decree joined the antinarcotic and anti-poverty social programs of Plan Colombia's Investment Fund for Peace (FIP) with the programs of the Network of Social Solidarity (RSS) and the Colombian Agency for International Cooperation (ACCI). According to Diego Andres Molano, Director of Presidential Programs for Accion Social, the reorganization helped the Presidency better address the overlapping issues of the narcotics trade, poverty, and violence that affect the most vulnerable segments of Colombian society. In addition, he continued, the new organization offers more efficient management of the rapidly growing programs the agency oversees.

SUCCESS OF ANTINARCOTICS AND ANTI-POVERTY MEASURES

3. Accion Social has continued the antinarcotics social programs of Plan Colombia's Investment Fund for Peace. In 2005, mobile eradication groups manually eradicated over 30,000 hectares of illicit crops, primarily coca. (In 2006 they have destroyed roughly 4,000 hectares of coca and 50 hectares of opium poppy.) Alternative development projects, in conjunction with USAID, have helped 170,000 families in coca and poppy zones in 25 departments move away from illegal cultivation and toward licit crops such as cacao, fruit, and organic coffee. In addition, programs such as "Familias Guardabosques" offer subsidies of up to USD 1,600 per year to over 30,000 families who have moved from growing illicit crops to acting as stewards of the local environment.

4. Accion Social also continues the anti-poverty measures included in Plan Colombia through programs such as Families in Action, which offers nutritional and educational supplements to families with children under age 18. The GOC spent USD 142 million on the program in 2005. With recent expansions in coverage and new programs for displaced families, it is expected to reach nearly 1 million children in 700 municipalities by the end of 2006. More than USD 400 million has also been made available for infrastructure projects, primarily for roads and bridges, but also for electrification, sanitation and recreation facilities, and community development projects.

ASSISTANCE TO VICTIMS OF CONFLICT

5. Accion Social manages the programs for victims of violence previously run by the Network of Social Solidarity. Colombians who have lost property or loved ones to terrorist acts can receive reimbursement, and families can obtain reimbursement of up to 40 times the minimum monthly salary if a family member is killed as a result of terrorism. When

the Uribe administration took office, nearly USD 90 million worth of claims had not been paid to eligible families. Most claims have now been paid, and the Presidency expects the remainder to be paid by the end of the President's first term.

16. Accion Social's National System for Integrated Attention to the Displaced Population (SNAIPD) has helped to account for, register, and assist the displaced population. With formal registration, displaced persons can avail themselves of standard welfare programs. Today, for example, nearly half of the displaced population has registered for health benefits through the social security system. Through the coordination of Accion Social, poverty relief programs such as Families in Action have now expanded to address displaced persons. Construction projects in 125 municipalities that had been attacked by illegal armed groups have been completed, including entire communities such as Bojaya in Choco. As a result, while the number of new displaced persons peaked in 2002, it has fallen every year of the Uribe administration to only one third of the peak level in 2005. Although the GOC reports 82,000 displaced persons have returned to their homes through formal resettlement programs, and many others of their own accord, a recent USAID study showed that nearly 90 percent of the remaining displaced do not have even one of their most basic human needs met, showing just how far the GOC still needs to go.

OTHER PROGRAMS

17. The third component of Accion Social is the Colombian Agency for International Cooperation (ACCI). To better align aid to domestic development priorities, the agency developed a Strategy for International Cooperation which they presented at a conference with aid donors in Cartagena in February of 2005. The agency developed a unique multimedia tool on its web site, called the Map of International Cooperation, which allows donors to generate lists of ongoing projects by type for every department and municipality in the country. USAID reports that they now hold monthly consultations with Accion Social in five key development areas, strengthening their coordination and communication with the GOC. As a result, Colombia has maintained its high level of multilateral and bilateral development assistance in the USD 300 million range for the past 3 years, and looks to do the same in 2006.

18. In 2004, the Uribe Administration created the Integral Action Coordination Center (CCAI) to help guarantee State presence, governance, and legitimacy in nine recently recovered strategic zones covering 51 of Colombia's poorest municipalities. Composed of 12 GOC agencies and ministries, CCAI has organized nearly 90 joint visits to the municipalities, offering a range of services from registration to simple surgical procedures to over 200,000 residents. In many of the communities, consultation with local leaders has resulted in infrastructure and alternative development programs. According to Juan Pablo Franco, Assistant Coordinator for CCAI, Accion Social has taken the lead role in coordinating the efforts of the participant agencies. The initiative encourages ministries to spend more of their budgets in these neglected zones, and they have already committed USD 45.1 million for 2006.

THE FRUIT OF SPECIAL SOCIAL PROGRAMS

19. Luis Alfonso Hoyos, Senior Presidential Advisor for Accion Social, states that a total of 4 million Colombians in marginal circumstances and/or victims of violence have now benefited from over USD 1 billion in social spending under Plan Colombia. Since 2002, the number of internally displaced persons has fallen more than 60 percent; matriculation in primary and secondary schools has risen 12 percent; the percentage of the population availing themselves of subsidized health services has risen from 25 percent to 35 percent; and the percentage of Colombians living in poverty has fallen from 58 percent to 53 percent.

110. COMMENT. Much attention is paid to the Uribe Administration's increase in defense spending under Plan Colombia. Less apparent has been the Administration's commitment to increase funding for social programs to complement the strategy of Democratic Security. As shown above, with these efforts nearly every indicator of social development at the national level has shown marked improvement. Centralizing program management into a single organization, Accion Social, appears to have improved management and coordination. Moreover, through initiatives such as CCAI, the Presidency has empowered Accion Social to take the lead with the ministries in getting aid to those strategic areas which need it most. END COMMENT.

